

PLANNING PERSPECTIVES



Focusing on Planning in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania

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Congratulations to Our 2016 Montgomery Award Winners!

The great quality of development taking place in Montgomery County and the value of planning advocacy were highlighted on November 9 during the Montgomery Awards presentation at Theatre Horizon in Norristown. The annual [Montgomery Awards](#) program recognizes the best in planning, design, and advocacy in Montgomery County and acknowledges the high-quality work and commitment of communities, organizations, and professionals. This year, five Montgomery Awards were presented to the following recipients:

Narberth Place

NARBERTH BOROUGH

[Narberth Place](#) received the award in recognition of adaptive reuse, historic preservation, creative site design, and successful community collaboration. This exceptional project, which preserved and creatively transformed two historic landmark buildings into unique residential condominiums and added new complementary townhouses, demonstrates how treasured buildings in our communities can be preserved in a way that respects the past while embracing the future.



The Courts at Spring Mill Station

WHITEMARSH TOWNSHIP

[The Courts at Spring Mill Station](#) received the award in recognition of creative site planning, pedestrian amenities and enhancements, and positive community reinvestment. This outstanding transit-oriented development, which successfully transformed a former industrial site into an appealing apartment complex, provides convenient access to transit and recreational amenities and offers inviting community spaces.

Einstein Medical Center Montgomery

EAST NORRITON TOWNSHIP

[Einstein Medical Center Montgomery](#) received the award in recognition of creative vision, sensitive site planning, and sustainable design. This extraordinary state-of-the-art medical campus, which creates a unique healing landscape that enriches the patient and visitor experience, demonstrates a commitment to sustainability and environmental stewardship and provides positive economic impacts in the community.



Sustainability and Innovation Hub of the Montgomery County Community College POTTSTOWN BOROUGH

The [Sustainability and Innovation Hub](#) received the award in recognition of sustainable design, successful restoration, vision, and collaborative efforts. This unique adaptive reuse project has resulted in a state-of-the-art center for education, innovation, and conservation that offers opportunities for the community to learn, share information, and work together to create a healthy and sustainable environment.



Reliance Crossing SOUDERTON BOROUGH

[Reliance Crossing](#) received the award in recognition of sensitive site design, appealing architectural details, and positive community impact. This well-designed housing community, which provides attractive affordable housing in Montgomery County, blends with the character of the neighborhood and has provided a significant economic investment in Souderton Borough.

Paul W. Meyer PLANNING ADVOCATE AWARD



[Paul W. Meyer](#) received the award for exceptional leadership and advocacy in the planning, preservation, and stewardship of Montgomery County’s special natural places. His many achievements come from his passion of ensuring that future generations have the opportunity to be inspired by the natural world and his desire to connect people, places, and plants through greenways and trails, parks, and preserved open spaces.



Attending the celebration are (L-R) Robert E. Blue, Jr., MCPC Board member; Kenneth B. Hughes, former MCPC Director; Marc D. Jonas, Esq., former MCPC Board Chair; Dulcie F. Flabarty, MCPC Board Vice Chair; Feodor Pitcairn, former MCPC Board Chair; Charles J. Tornetta, MCPC Board member; Steven Kline, MCPC Board Chair; Jody L. Holton, MCPC Executive Director; Scott Zelov, former MCPC Board member; and Jill Blumhardt, MCPC Board member.

Celebrating Charlie Tornetta’s 50 Years of Service

On October 19, the Montgomery County Planning Commission celebrated Charlie Tornetta’s 50 years of service on the MCPC Board. Several past board members and former planning staff, as well as Charlie’s family and friends, joined the board and staff in honoring Charlie. All spoke highly of his service and expressed gratitude for everything he has done for the county these past 50 years. As part of the informal ceremony, Charlie received a resolution of appreciation from the board and citations from the Pennsylvania House and Senate.

Charlie, who manages a large realty firm, was first appointed to the planning commission board on October 20, 1966. From 1968 through 1991 he served as chair of the board, successfully leading it through years of significant growth in the county. With his vast expertise in real estate and incredible knowledge of the county, Charlie has been an invaluable member of the many planning commission subcommittees he has served on. In addition to his work with MCPC, Charlie has been an active supporter of the county and Norristown, serving on various boards and committees. We look forward to continuing to work with Charlie on the MCPC Board.



Sullivan's Bridge Opens

On August 19, a large crowd at Sullivan's Bridge in Valley Forge National Historical Park enjoyed their first walk, ride, or run over the long-awaited pedestrian and bicycle bridge over the Schuylkill River, which connects important trails within both parts of park. This bridge links the very popular Schuylkill River Trail with nearly 8 miles of multiuse trails in Valley Forge National Historical Park and the Schuylkill River West Trail being built in Upper Merion Township. All of the nearly 500 people attending the opening felt the new bridge will be a great asset to the region, providing more opportunities to bike to work and get outside to have a healthy adventure. Thanks to everyone who worked together over several years to make it happen. It was a partnership of all levels of government getting it done the right way.



Bike Montco Plan Kicks Off

Making biking a safe and attractive option in Montgomery County will be the focus of the county's new [Bike Montco](#) plan. This plan will be prepared by the planning commission staff working with a diverse steering committee, the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, and an engineering consultant. The plan will establish a blueprint to achieve several major goals in the county's comprehensive plan, [Montco 2040: A Shared Vision](#), by recommending a system of safe bicycle routes and trails while also defining important bicycling policies to further enhance bicycle use. These recommendations will provide several benefits,

including expanded transportation choices, improved health opportunities, better community connections, and improved air quality through reduced vehicle miles traveled, and will make the county more appealing to young workers. The plan will thoroughly update and revise the county's 1998 bicycling plan. While that plan provides a good outline of future bicycle mobility policy initiatives, the new plan will fully address the current bicycle needs of the county and will provide recommended bicycle route priorities.



MCPC Develops New Guidebook on Rethinking Institutional Properties

MCPC has released a new guidebook to assist municipal leaders and developers in the successful adaptive reuse of institutional properties, such as schools, religious institutions, government buildings, and hospitals. The guidebook, [Rethinking Institutional Properties: Embracing Our Past and Investing in Our Future](#), is an attractive and informative publication that provides perspective on the challenges and opportunities in the adaptive reuse of institutional properties within a community. The guidebook provides case studies that illustrate the adaptive reuse process and offers several tools and approaches that could be used to meet the needs of any community in addressing the adaptive reuse of various types of institutional properties.

A well-attended seminar on the new guidebook took place in Ambler Borough Hall, a former school, on October 26. After a welcome from Mayor Jeanne Sorg, MCPC planners Brian Olszak and Sarah Richardsen provided a thorough review of the new guidebook. Chris Leswing, Assistant Director of Building and Planning for Lower Merion Township; Peter Phillips, Managing Principal of Phillips & Associates Architects, LLC; and George Marks, Managing Partner of Kramer+Marks Architects, all provided presentations on the topic.

The guidebook was also presented during a session at the PA Chapter of the American Planning Association conference in Allentown in October. MCPC staff members are available to make future presentations of this important guidebook to local officials and other interested groups.

We'd Like to Hear from Our Municipalities!

A survey is now under way to help us shape our services to better meet municipal planning needs throughout Montgomery County. The [survey link](#) was emailed to municipal managers, elected officials, and planning commission members in early November. The survey results will assist us with our proposed work plan for 2017. Please let us know your thoughts. We value your insight and thank you for your help in this important effort.



MCPC planners tour Allentown's new PPL Center sports arena as part of the PA APA conference (L-R) Matthew Edmond, Section Chief: Transportation Planning; Maggie Dobbs, Planner II; Matthew Popek, Transportation Planner; Donna Fabry, Planner II; and Crystal Gilchrist, Principal Multimodal Transportation Planner.

MCPC Shines at PA APA Conference in Allentown

Seven MCPC planners delivered technical presentations, more than any other county planning commission in the state, at the Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Planning Association (PA APA) conference in Allentown this fall. Presenters included:

- Barry Jeffries and Michael Stokes - Green and Sustainable Parking Lots
- Anne Leavitt Gruberger - Walkability
- Matthew Schelly - Preserving Natural Greenways
- Sarah Richardsen and Brian Olszak - Successful Adaptive Reuse of Institutional Properties
- Scott France - Reinventing the Suburban Office Park

Several other MCPC planners attended portions of the three-day professional conference, which is the largest annual conference for planners in the state. The PA Chapter of APA is a nonprofit, non-partisan organization for the promotion of planning and for professional planners and planning officials in the Commonwealth with approximately 3,000 members.



Maggie Dobbs, Planner II, attends North Wales Community Day to gain input on the North Wales Borough Comprehensive Plan.

MCPC Planners Increase Public Outreach

Plans are most effective when they embrace the collective vision of the public. Getting public opinion and reaction to broad planning issues can be an important but challenging task for planners. In our busy world, people often do not have time to attend meetings to share their ideas in traditional ways. Even if they can attend a meeting, it is important for planners to use the public's time wisely and craft easy ways for them to articulate the type of community they desire in the future. In addition to public meetings, our staff has developed strategies to reach the public in places they congregate and to utilize successful online tools to gather opinions.



Donna Fabry, Planner II, and Jon Lesher, Principal Planner I, enjoy discussing the Pottstown Sustainability Plan.

Increasingly, our planners have found that the best way to connect to the public is to get out and take part in local community events. Our planners have been setting up creative and attractive displays at many community days and other local events to share information about current planning projects and to get ideas from the public about the future of their communities. Though this meant spending a whole Saturday working, our planners got great feedback and learned a lot from the community in the process. The planners also raised awareness about planning among local residents. Expect to see our staff appearing at other local events in the future.

Our planners have also employed social media and the Internet to reach the public. Online surveys offer one



Michael Narcowich (foreground), Principal Planner II, and Brian Olszak, Planner II, were in Lansdale to receive comments on the Lansdale Borough Comprehensive Plan.

approach to information gathering on broad issues. Gathering public opinion with a local geographic connection can be done through comments placed directly onto online maps on Wiki platforms. This approach was valuable in seeking information on the [Walk Montco](#) plan and will be used for the [Bike Montco](#) plan in the next few months.

Meet Our New Farm Program Administrator

Danielle Weiden started as our new Farmland Program Administrator on October 24. Prior to joining MCPC, she was the assistant farmland preservation program coordinator in Burlington County where she was successful in preserving over 4,000 acres of farms over the past 12 years. During some of that time, Danielle also assisted the Burlington County Farmers Market with arranging special events and cooking demonstrations and creating successful advertising campaigns.



Her initial interest in agriculture came from her grandfather, who grew up on a New Jersey dairy farm and had his own 2-acre victory garden. She learned the value of farmland preservation when her grandfather took her for drives near his home and pointed out all of the farms that had turned into housing developments.

Danielle expects to develop creative, technological solutions to improve the management of the Montgomery County Agriculture Lands Preservation Program to better serve the farming community. After automating much of the farm preservation program requirements, she will be able to spend more time working with farmers to make local farming more sustainable. She is passionate about farming and the

possibilities of connecting farmers with local restaurants, farmers' markets, and local food stores to sell products raised and produced in Montgomery County.



(L-R) Jody Holton, Executive Director; Eric Jarrell, Assistant Section Chief II; John Cover, Assistant Director; Jon Lesher, Principal Planner I; Maggie Dobbs, Planner II; Brian Olszak, Planner II; Michael Narcowich, Principal Planner II; Donna Fabry, Planner II; and Sarah Richardsen, Planner II.

Staff Promotions

The Montgomery County Planning Commission has long prided itself on having the best and brightest people who work hard and care deeply about great planning in Montgomery County. It's easy to understand why many of our employees earn promotions, and we are pleased to announce the most recent promotions: John Cover (Assistant Director), Eric Jarrell (Assistant Section Chief II), Maggie Dobbs (Planner II), Donna Fabry (Planner II), Michael Narcowich (Principal Planner II), Brian Olszak (Planner II), Sarah Richardsen (Planner II), and Jon Lesher (Principal Planner I). Our staff celebrated the promotions at a potluck breakfast announcement event. Congratulations everyone!



Montgomery County Planning Commission

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